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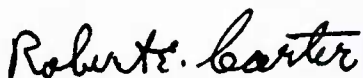
**REACTOR DOSIMETRY WITH PAIRED
MINIATURE IONIZATION CHAMBERS**

D. W. Shosa

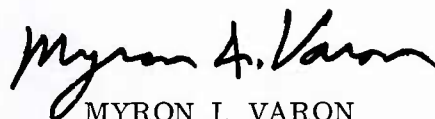
ARMED FORCES RADIOBIOLOGY RESEARCH INSTITUTE
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REACTOR DOSIMETRY WITH PAIRED
MINIATURE IONIZATION CHAMBERS

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ABSTRACT

Paired ionization chambers with nominal volumes of 0.05 cm^3 are in use at the Armed Forces Radiobiology Research Institute to measure neutron and gamma components of depth doses in steady-state and pulsed TRIGA fields. Cavity chamber theory is employed to obtain quantitative estimates of neutron and gamma dose sensitivities of a chamber with a tissue-equivalent plastic wall filled with a tissue-equivalent gas and a magnesium chamber filled with CO_2 . The uncertainties in these estimates have been propagated through the paired chamber equations and result in the following uncertainties in measured dose components in a field where the neutron to gamma dose ratio varies from 0.1 to 15

Total dose ± 8 percent
Gamma dose ± 20 percent ($N/\Gamma \lesssim 0.1$) to ± 30 percent ($N/\Gamma \gtrsim 10$)
Neutron dose ± 8 percent ($N/\Gamma \gtrsim 10$) to ± 12 percent ($N/\Gamma \sim 0.1$).

I. INTRODUCTION

When biological specimens are exposed to the radiations of a nuclear reactor, there is a minimum amount of information necessary to characterize the exposure. Because the biological effects of neutron and gamma ray interactions with tissue may be different, the specification of total kerma at a point in the field, or even total absorbed dose at points of interest within the specimen, provides only an incomplete picture. To correlate data from different exposures, information on the separate neutron and gamma components of the total absorbed dose at points within the specimen is usually essential. Further, in situations where biological damage depends on the dose rates, the dosimetry must measure those rates. The dosimetry characteristics required to support radiobiological experiments in the reactor environment must:

- (a) have a dose rate range extending from a few rads per minute to approximately 10^6 rads per minute,
- (b) be sufficiently small so that perturbation of the radiation field is minimal and so that depth-dose profiles may be determined in phantoms and cadavers,
- (c) be able to accurately determine the tissue dose delivered by reactor neutrons for the range of neutron energies extending from those in an unmoderated fission spectrum to those in moderated spectra which exist in the interior of large animal specimens, and
- (d) be able to determine the gamma ray contribution to the tissue dose.

The purpose of this paper is to describe a paired chamber dosimetry system, consisting of tissue-equivalent (TE) and "neutron-insensitive" ionization chambers,

which satisfies the above requirements. A specific application to depth-dose profile determination in a miniature pig cadaver has been discussed by Verrelli and Shosa.¹²

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A diagram of a 0.05 cm^3 ionization chamber, designed by Wyckoff and Shonka,⁶ is shown in Figure 1. This total dose sensitive TE chamber is made of tissue-equivalent plastic (Shonka A-150) and filled with tissue-equivalent gas, the compositions of which are shown in Table I. The "neutron-insensitive" chamber is made of magnesium and filled with CO_2 . The gas is introduced through surgical tubing and a #28 hypodermic needle, and exits through a hole located on the opposite side of the antenna from the entrance needle. Because it is difficult to maintain small, uniform, reproducible flow rates, the chambers are placed in cylindrical Lucite jackets, purged with gas, and a gas flow of $100\text{--}200 \text{ cm}^3/\text{min}$ is continued through the jackets. The flow through the chambers is stopped after purging is complete. In depth-dose distribution measurements, the jackets also serve to insulate wet tissue from the high voltage applied to the chambers and, for free-in-air measurements, they help to produce charged particle equilibrium in the chamber walls.

A Microdot signal lead carries the radiation-induced chamber current to a precision variable-gain amplifier and then to a digital voltmeter. For dosimetry in pulsed fields, the total charge collected during the pulse is given by the product of the voltage and the amplifier capacitance. For steady-state dosimetry, the readout system integrates for a preset time and the total charge collected is divided by the time interval to determine the charging rate, which is related to the dose rate. In both steady-state and pulsed modes of operation, measurements are made in pairs, one

with positive and one with negative high voltage applied to the outer wall of the chamber. The average of the magnitudes of the two measurements is taken to be the magnitude of the charge collected by the chamber. The averaging process is necessary to eliminate polarity-independent, radiation-induced signals in the Microdot leads (the chamber current polarity changes with the polarity of applied high voltage).

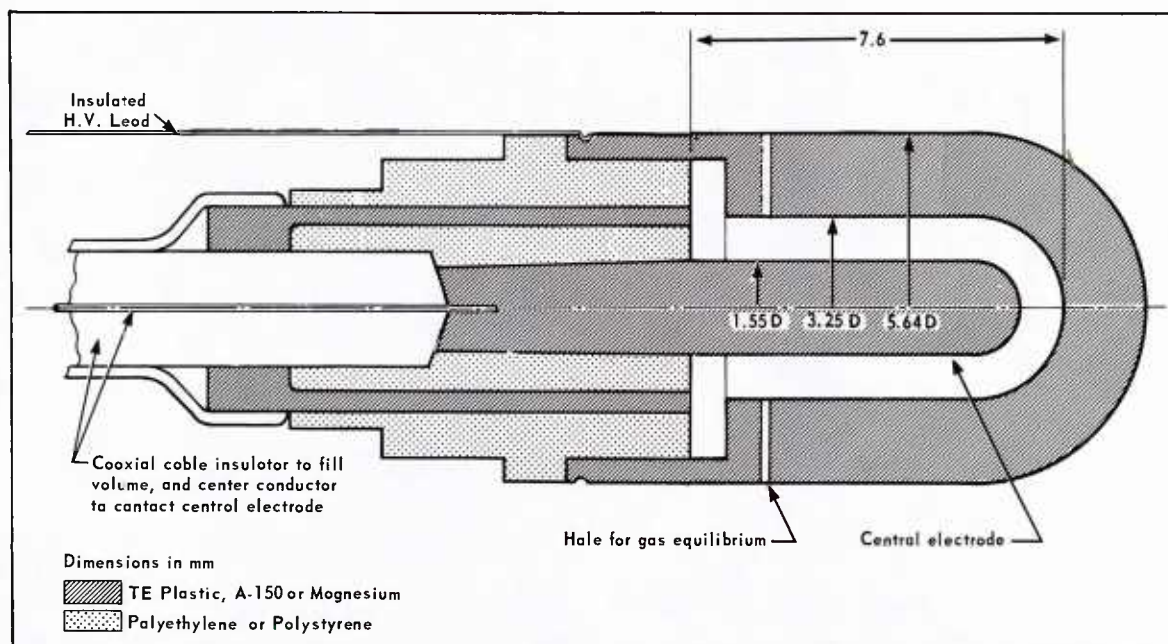


Figure 1. Section of 0.05 cm³ ionization chamber

| Atomic species | Mass fraction | |
|----------------|---------------|---------|
| | Gas | Plastic |
| H | 0.101 | 0.103 |
| C | 0.457 | 0.774 |
| N | 0.034 | 0.035 |
| O | 0.408 | 0.040 |
| F | | 0.024 |
| Ca | | 0.025 |

Table I. Compositions of Tissue-Equivalent Gas and Tissue-Equivalent Plastic

III. THE ANALYSIS OF CHAMBER RESPONSE

The paired chamber technique for separation of neutron and gamma absorbed dose components is discussed by several authors.^{2,5,9,10} The basic principle is that the radiation-induced charge in a chamber is made up of one component which is linear with the neutron tissue dose and another component which is linear with the gamma tissue dose. The response equation is then

$$Q = \xi kN + \eta a\Gamma \quad (1)$$

where Q is the charge produced by radiation within the chamber when exposed simultaneously to a neutron dose of N rads and a gamma dose of Γ rads, k and a are neutron and gamma ray sensitivity coefficients, and ξ and η are neutron and gamma attenuation corrections. To minimize uncertainties associated with the sensitive volumes of the chambers, which are difficult to determine independently, all charges are normalized to a unit of charge equal to the charge measured by the chamber when exposed to 1 R of gamma rays. ^{60}Co or ^{137}Cs gamma rays are used for this calibration. Each of the chambers has a response governed by an equation of the form of equation (1), and when the chambers are exposed simultaneously the response equations may be solved simultaneously to obtain N and Γ

Voltage-response characteristics in a variety of gamma and mixed neutron-gamma fields show that both chambers are operating in plateaus with 500 volts of either polarity applied to the outer electrode.

When the energy spectrum in the calibration field is similar to that of the gamma component of the mixed field, the gamma sensitivity coefficient, a , is 1.04.⁹ For the TE chamber this condition is satisfied for either a ^{60}Co or ^{137}Cs calibration. For

the magnesium chamber, however, a low-energy gamma component in the mixed field will cause the gamma sensitivity coefficient to be higher than 1.04. Based on the results of experiments by Bruce and Pearson⁴ and by the author, one concludes that a gamma sensitivity coefficient of 1.09 ± 0.05 for the magnesium chamber should provide sufficient latitude to cover the environments encountered in animal irradiations at our facility.

The perturbation of the absorbed dose inside a mass of tissue due to the Lucite jacket and the chamber is less than 0.5 percent. This small perturbation is due to slightly different transport properties of Lucite and tissue and to the small mass of solid displaced by the gas in the cavity. For depth-dose distribution measurements, then, $\bar{\epsilon}$ and η are very near unity. For free-in-air kerma measurements, perturbation corrections are estimated for the gamma component of the field with equilibrium cap measurements in ^{60}Co and ^{137}Cs gamma fields. Neutron attenuation corrections are calculated in a manner similar to that used by Neary et al.¹⁰ A summary of the perturbation corrections for free-in-air measurements is shown in Table II.

Table II.. Perturbation Corrections for Free-in-Air
Measurement of Tissue Kerma
(Lucite probe included)

| Chamber | $\bar{\epsilon}$ | η |
|---------|------------------|--------|
| TE | 0.90 | 0.96 |
| Mg | 0.95 | 0.98 |

The neutron sensitivity coefficient of the TE chamber is determined by application of the Bragg-Gray cavity chamber theory for homogeneous chambers.¹ To estimate the neutron sensitivity of the Mg-CO₂ chamber, a comparison for a variety

of reactor fields was made with a 50 cm³ graphite-CO₂ chamber. The neutron sensitivity of the graphite-CO₂ chamber was estimated with the application of homogeneous cavity theory. Neutron sensitivity coefficients are displayed in Table III.

Table III. Estimates of Neutron Sensitivity Coefficients

| Chamber | k |
|--|------|
| TE | 0.98 |
| Graphite-CO ₂ (50 cm ³) | 0.08 |
| Mg-CO ₂ (0.05 cm ³) | 0.07 |

Estimates of the systematic errors associated with the measurement of charges and estimates of sensitivity coefficients are shown in Figure 2. These arise from the following estimates of systematic error components:

(a) An estimated uncertainty of ± 3 percent for the neutron sensitivity coefficient of the TE chamber arises as a result of an energy dependence of W for heavy recoils.^{3,8,11}

(b) An estimated uncertainty of ± 10 -15 percent for the Mg chamber neutron sensitivity arises as a result of the energy dependence of W for heavy recoils and also as a result of an energy dependence of the mass energy transfer coefficients of Mg and CO₂ for neutrons relative to that of tissue.⁷

(c) An estimated uncertainty of ± 5 percent of the gamma sensitivity of the Mg chamber arises as a result of a low-energy component in the gamma component of the mixed field.

(d) An estimated uncertainty of ± 1 percent is associated with the charge measurement process.

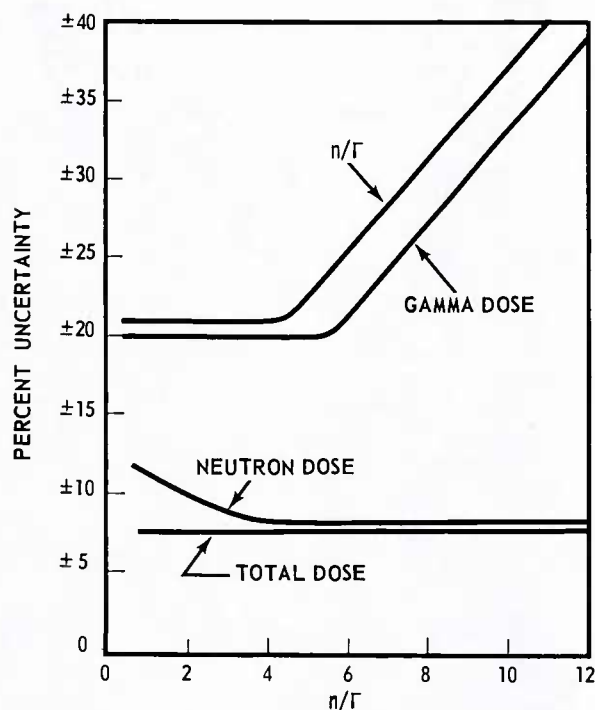


Figure 2. Uncertainty in separated neutron and gamma doses

IV. RESULTS

Comparison of the separated neutron and gamma, free-in-air, tissue kerma in a steady-state mixed field as measured by the miniature chambers described here and as measured by 50 cm³ TE-TE and graphite-CO₂ chambers is shown in Tables IV and V.

The differences observed in the comparison might be attributed to uncertainty in defining a "point" in the field with the 50 cm³ chambers and to different systematic errors associated with the two paired chamber systems.

Table IV. Comparison of Gamma Kerma Rate Measured with 50 cm³ and 0.05 cm³ Paired Chambers (25 kW, enhanced neutron field¹²)

| Distance from core (cm) | Kerma rate (rads/min) | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| | 50 cm ³ | 0.05 cm ³ |
| 100 | 12.8 | 12.0 |
| 120 | 12.9 | 12.3 |
| 150 | 12.7 | 12.7 |
| 200 | 11.4 | 11.3 |
| 250 | 10.8 | 11.0 |

Table V. Comparison of Neutron Kerma Rate Measured with 50 cm³ and 0.05 cm³ Paired Chambers (25 kW, enhanced neutron field¹²)

| Distance from core (cm) | Kerma rate (rads/min) | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| | 50 cm ³ | 0.05 cm ³ |
| 100 | 152 | 138 |
| 120 | 96 | 90 |
| 150 | 61 | 59 |
| 200 | 31 | 31 |
| 250 | 21 | 21 |

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A paired chamber dosimetry system has been described which shows promise of satisfying the requirements stated above for radiobiology experiments in reactor environments. The system will be useful for a wide variety of reactor environments in which the neutron dose is significant. Applications to mixed field environments in which the gamma component contains an uncertain low-energy contribution to tissue dose may involve large systematic errors.

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| 13. ABSTRACT <p>Paired ionization chambers with nominal volumes of 0.05 cm³ are in use at the Armed Forces Radiobiology Research Institute to measure neutron and gamma components of depth doses in steady-state and pulsed TRIGA fields. Cavity chamber theory is employed to obtain quantitative estimates of neutron and gamma dose sensitivities of a chamber with a tissue-equivalent plastic wall filled with a tissue-equivalent gas and a magnesium chamber filled with CO₂. The uncertainties in these estimates have been propagated through the paired chamber equations and result in the following uncertainties in measured dose components in a field where the neutron to gamma dose ratio varies from 0.1 to 15</p> <p style="margin-left: 100px;">Total dose ± 8 percent Gamma dose ± 20 percent (N/T ≤ 0.1) to ± 30 percent (N/T ≥ 10) Neutron dose ± 8 percent (N/T ≥ 10) to ± 12 percent (N/T ~ 0.1).</p> | | |

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